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The military's battlefield vow is to leave no soldier behind. But that's been hard to honor in the case of three U.S. servicemen whose remains have been buried since 1946 in a makeshift grave of snow and airplane debris on Antarctica. Now a group of adventurers led by Seattle photographer Lou Sapienza want to recover the bodies of the Navy aviators, who died after crash-landing their PBM-5 Mariner seaplane, the George One, during a mapping mission.

Sapienza wants the Pentagon to provide \$1.3 million for the mission and has been asking members of Congress to pressure the military for the money. He's also lined up support from survivors of the three, Ensign Maxwell A. Lopez, Aviation Machinist's Mate First Class Frederick Warren Williams and Aviation Radioman First Class Wendell K. Hendersin, the first Americans to die in Antarctica. Six others survived the crash and were found by another Navy plane after a 13-day ordeal. But rescuers were unable to retrieve the bodies of Lopez, Williams and Hendersin, which were buried under one wing of their plane.

The military has demurred on a recovery effort, citing the safety concerns and logistical challenges of locating the remains below 90 to 150 feet of snow and ice on Antarctica's Phantom Coast. But Sapienza says his crew can do the job relatively quickly and cheaply with a conical drill that uses hot water circulating in copper coils. (Sapienza, who photographed a 1990s expedition to Greenland that recovered a World War II-era P-38 Lightning known as "Glacier Girl," learned about the Antarctica case from the Smithsonian's Air and Space Magazine this past summer.)

His lobbying campaign is yielding some results. This month, Democratic Sen. Russ Feingold of Wisconsin — where lost aviator Hendersin was from — broached the subject with the Navy and was told to expect a decision soon. And Betty Jean Spencer, Hendersin's sister, persuaded her representative, Illinois Republican <Mark> <Steven> <Kirk, to press the Defense Department to fund the mission. "I think it offers an opportunity for good PR for the Navy," Kirk says, while also providing some comfort for the families. "Right now their loved ones are underneath a glacier."